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(54) **NON-INVASIVE CORROSION SENSOR**

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(58) Field of Search **374/4, 7, 45, 57, 374/120, 129, 44, 1, 5**

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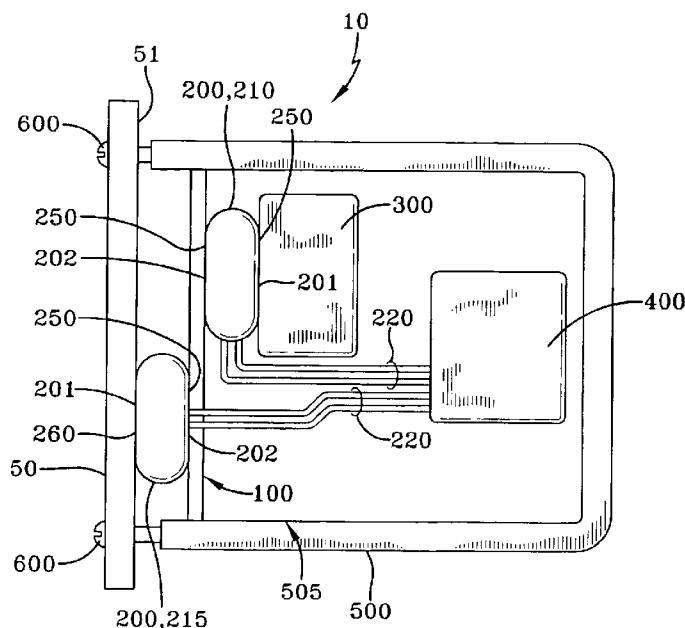
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The non-invasive corrosion sensor includes a heat sink, at least two peltiers, a reference standard and a data acquisition device. Each peltier has a negative side and a positive side, and each peltier communicates with the heat sink such that the negative side of each peltier is maintained at a common temperature. The reference standard communicates with the positive side of one of the peltiers while the test piece communicates with the positive side of the other peltier; and the data acquisition device is able to record and compare the differences in temperatures between the test piece and the reference standard. A higher temperature in the test piece than in the reference standard indicates the presence of corrosion. The differences in temperatures of the test piece and the reference standard are obtained via electrical currents in the peltiers.

11 Claims, 2 Drawing Sheets



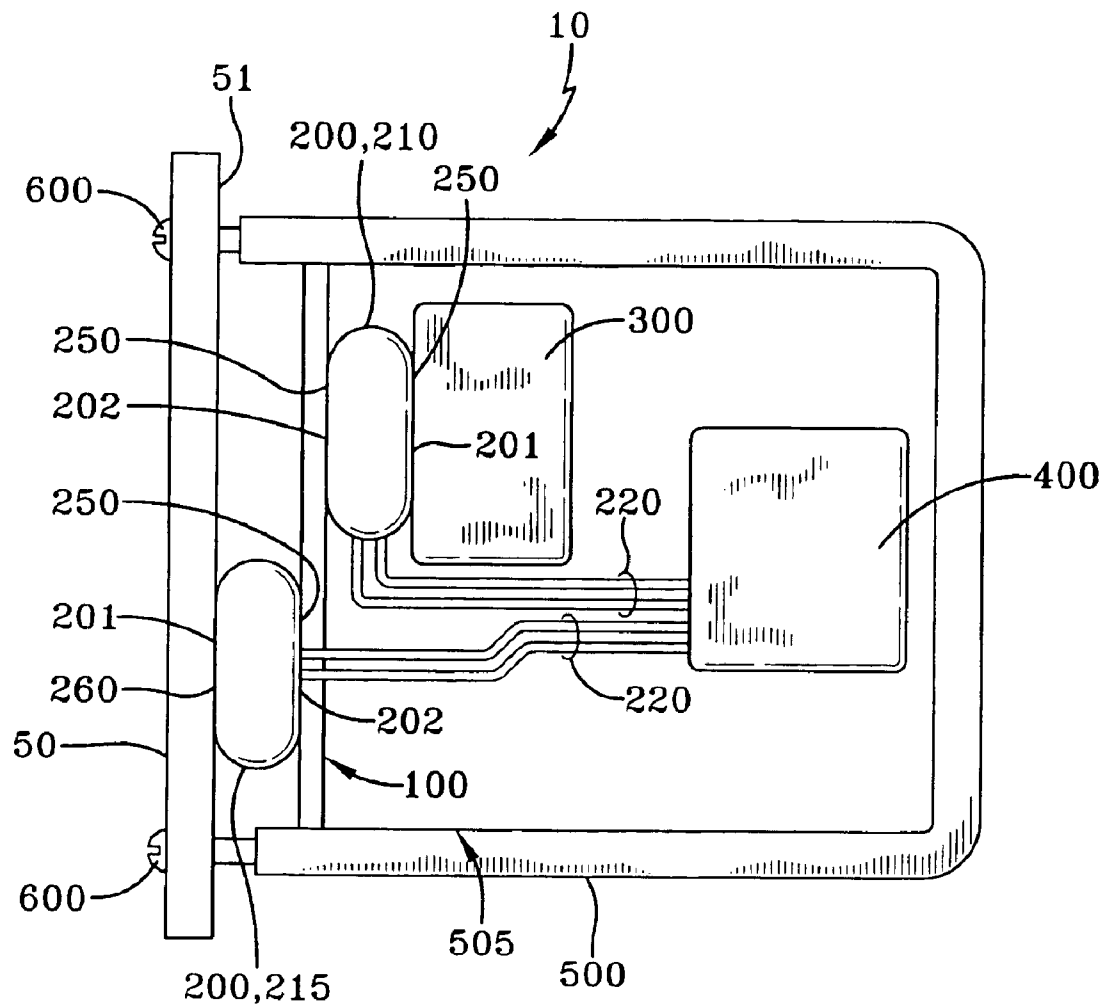


FIG-1

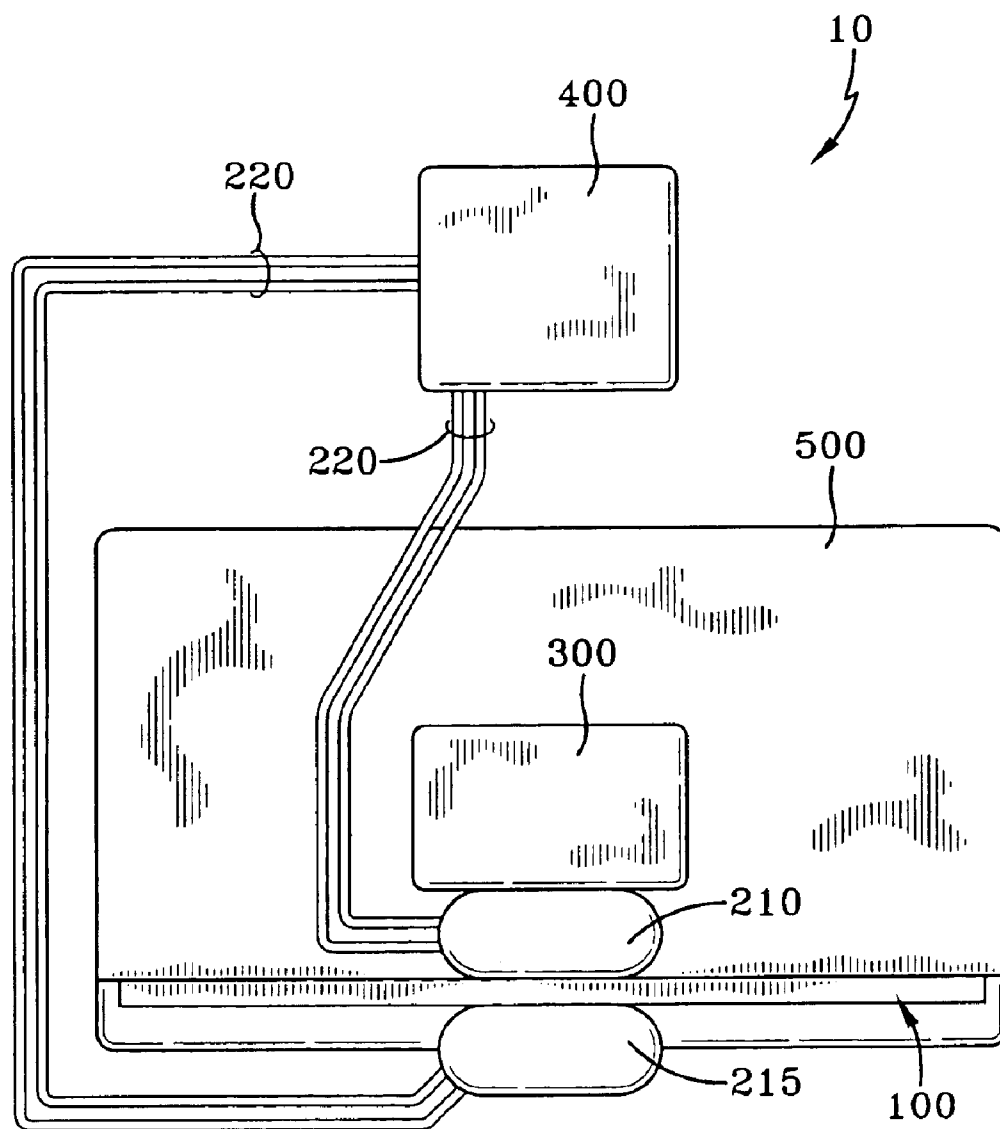


FIG-2

1

NON-INVASIVE CORROSION SENSOR

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTEREST

The invention described herein may be manufactured and used by or for the Government of the United States of America for governmental purposes without payment of any royalties thereon or therefor.

BACKGROUND

The present invention relates to a non-invasive corrosion sensor. More specifically, but without limitation, the present invention relates to a non-invasive corrosion sensor for detecting and measuring the rate of corrosion.

Current methods for detecting and measuring the rate of corrosion are non-quantitative, non-predictive and require visual observation of the surfaces. These methods often result in increased costs due to maintenance operations being performed prior to need or not soon enough. In either case the costs could be significantly reduced if maintenance could be performed at the most optimum time. This can only be accomplished through use of a method that will permit quantitative, continuous measurement of material surfaces not accessible during normal operations.

A commonly used method for detecting and measuring the rate of corrosion is visual inspection. To utilize this method the area must be accessible to viewing. Another method includes ultrasonic testing whereby sound waves detect changes in material properties (thickness and density). Additional methods are eddy current testing which detects changes in material/magnetic properties, and resistively testing which measures changes in a material's electrical resistance. All of these methods suffer from one or more of the above listed liabilities.

Thus, there is a need in the art to provide a method or mechanism that incorporates the listed benefits without the limitations inherent in present methods. For the foregoing reasons, there is a need for a non-invasive corrosion sensor.

SUMMARY

The present invention is directed to a non-invasive corrosion sensor. The non-invasive corrosion sensor includes a heat sink, at least two peltiers, a reference standard and a data acquisition device. Each peltier has a negative side and a positive side, and each peltier communicates with the heat sink such that the negative side of each peltier is maintained at a common temperature. The reference standard communicates with the positive side of one of the peltiers while the test piece communicates with the positive side of the other peltier; and the data acquisition device is able to record and compare the differences in temperatures between the test piece and the reference piece. A higher temperature in the test piece than in the reference standard indicates the presence of corrosion. The differences in temperatures of the test piece and the reference standard are obtained via electrical currents in the peltiers.

It is an object of the invention to provide a non-invasive corrosion sensor for detecting and measuring the rate of corrosion that is quantitative and predictive.

It is an object of the invention to provide a non-invasive corrosion sensor that does not require visual observation of the surfaces.

It is an object of the invention to provide a non-invasive corrosion sensor that does not require operators to perform a test or collect data.

2

DRAWINGS

These and other features, aspects and advantages of the present invention will become better understood with reference to the following description and appended claims, and accompanying drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is a side view of one of the embodiments of the non-invasive corrosion sensor, and,

FIG. 2 is a side view of another one of the embodiments of the non-invasive corrosion sensor.

DESCRIPTION

The preferred embodiments of the present invention are illustrated by way of example in FIGS. 1 and 2. As seen in FIGS. 1 and 2, the non-invasive corrosion sensor 10 includes a heat sink 100, at least two peltiers 200, and a reference standard 300. Each peltier 200 may include a positive side 201 and a negative side 202. The peltiers 200 communicate with the heat sink 100 such that the negative side 202 of each of the peltiers 200 is maintained at a common temperature. The reference standard 300 communicates with the positive side 201 of one of the peltiers while the test piece 50 communicates with the positive side 201 of the other peltier 200. A data acquisition device 400 may be utilized to record and compare the differences in temperatures of the test piece 50 and the reference standard 300.

A heat sink 100 may be defined, but without limitation, as a material with high thermal conductivity used to equilibrate the temperatures on adjacent sides of the peltier 200. In the preferred embodiment of the invention the heat sink 100 is manufactured from aluminum.

A peltier 200 may be defined, but without limitation, as a thermo-electric device made of semiconductor material which heats or cools when an electric current is passed through the conductors. Conversely when the opposing surfaces of a peltier 200 are subjected to a temperature differential a measurable and calibratable current will be generated. This current can be converted to a microwatt heat load. As seen in FIGS. 1 and 2, the preferred embodiment of the invention includes two peltiers 200: a reference peltier 210 and a test piece peltier 215. The reference peltier 210 thermally communicates with the reference standard 300, while the test piece peltier 215 thermally communicates with the test piece 50. The negative side 202 of each peltier 200 is maintained at a common temperature through contact with the common heat sink 100. The opposing positive side 201 of the each peltier 200 is in contact with the reference standard 300 and the test piece 50 respectively.

A reference standard 300 may be defined, but without limitation, as a material identical to the test piece 50 (the material being monitored). In the preferred embodiment, the reference standard 300 is polished to remove all surface corrosion/contaminates and is sealed for protection.

The data acquisition device 400 may be defined, but without limitation, as a device capable of measuring and recording small electrical currents.

The non-invasive corrosion sensor 10 may also include an enclosure 500. The heat sink 100, the peltier(s) 200, and the reference standard 300 may be disposed within the enclosure 500. The preferred embodiment of the enclosure 500 is manufactured from polycarbonate. Polycarbonate may be defined, but without limitation, as a tough, highly impact resistant, corrosion resistant, non-conductive polymer. The interior of the enclosure 500 and its components may be environmentally sealed with flowable RTV (Room Temperature Vulcanizing) silicone coating 505. The preferred

3

embodiment of the silicone coating is a one-part, flowable, solvent-free room temperature cure, which can be found under the brand name of Dow Corning® 3140 RTV Coating.

In the preferred embodiment of the sensor **10**, the test piece peltier **215** is external to the enclosure **500**. Each of the peltiers **200** may include peltier leads **220**.

The enclosure **500** is designed to bolt into contact with the test piece **50**. Twin peltier leads **220** from the reference peltier **210** and the test piece peltier **215** may protrude from the enclosure **500**. Each negative side **202** of the two peltiers **200** is bonded to the heat sink **100** with thermal epoxy **250**. The positive side **201** of the internal or reference peltier **210** is bonded to the reference standard **300** with thermal epoxy **250**. Thermal epoxy **250** may be defined, but without limitation, as a two part epoxy which forms a permanent thermal bond. Thermal epoxy **250** may be, but without limitation, silver filled, aluminum oxide filled or aluminum nitride filled. The preferred thermal epoxy **250** may have a thermal conductivity of about 1.73 W/m-K, and may operate in temperatures of about -55 to about 125° C. The preferred thermal epoxy cures in about 1 hour at about 85° C. The preferred thermal epoxy is a two-part aluminum oxide filled epoxy TEC manufactured by Melcor. Thermal interface material, constructed of aluminum oxide with Adhesive Interface Pads, may be substituted for the thermal epoxy. The preferred embodiment of the thermal interface material may have a thermal conductivity of about 1.7 W/m-K and a maximum operating temperature of about 150° C. However, it is understood that any material that can bond, bind, fasten, or the like can be used.

In operation, the sensor **10** is fastened to the test piece **50** with stainless cap screws **600** or any other type of fastener. These screws place the external peltier's (test piece peltier **215**) positive side **201**, which is bonded to the test piece surface **51** with thermal grease **260**, in compression (about 150-300 psi). Thermal grease **260** may be defined, but without limitation, as a grease that provides a thermal conductive path and allows the option of disassembly. Examples of thermal grease **260** include metal-oxide-filled synthetic grease, silicone based thermal grease, phase change thermal interface material, thermal joint compound, and the like. The preferred thermal grease **260** is Zinc-Oxide/Silicon based grease or paste. The preferred thermal grease **260** is about 60% to about 80% zinc oxide with dimethyl polysiloxane, silicone fluid and polymethylsiloxane. The preferred thermal grease **260** has a specific gravity of about 2.2, its solubility in water is negligible and has a flashpoint above 250 degrees Fahrenheit. Thermal interface material may be substituted for the thermal grease. However, it is understood that any material that can bond, bind, fasten, or the like and then allow the option of disassembly can be used.

The leads **220** of the peltiers **200** are connected to the data acquisition device **400**. The negative side **202** of each peltier is maintained at a common temperature through contact with common heat sink **100**. The opposing positive side **201** of each peltier **200** (reference peltier **210** and test piece **215**) is in contact with the reference standard **300** and the test piece **50** respectively. A difference in temperatures between the reference standard **300** and the test piece **50** will generate a differing electrical current from each peltier **200**. This output is recorded and compared (reference vs. test piece) by the data acquisition device **400**. An increase in current from the test piece peltier **215** over the reference peltier **210** indicates a positive heat differential and the presence of corrosion.

When introducing elements of the present invention or the preferred embodiment(s) thereof, the articles "a," "an," "the," and "said" are intended to mean there are one or more of the elements. The terms "comprising," "including," and "having" are intended to be inclusive and mean that there may be additional elements other than the listed elements.

4

Although the present invention has been described in considerable detail with reference to certain preferred versions thereof, other versions are possible. Therefore, the spirit and scope of the appended claims should not be limited to the description of the preferred versions contained herein.

What is claimed is:

1. A non-invasive corrosion sensor, the sensor able to detect corrosion on a test piece, the non-invasive corrosion sensor comprising:

- a. a heat sink;
- b. a reference peltier and a test piece peltier, each having a positive side and a negative side, each peltier communicating with the heat sink such that the negative side of each peltier is maintained at a common temperature;
- c. a reference standard, the reference standard communicating with the positive side of the peltier, the test piece communicating with the positive side of the test piece peltier; and
- d. a data acquisition device, the data acquisition device able to record and compare the differences in temperatures of the test piece and the reference standard, whereby a higher temperature in the test piece than in the reference standard indicates the presence of corrosion, the differences in temperatures of the test piece and the reference standard obtained via electrical currents in the reference peltier and the test piece peltier.

2. A non-invasive corrosion sensor, the sensor able to detect corrosion on a test piece, the non-invasive corrosion sensor comprising:

- a. a heat sink;
- b. a reference peltier and a test piece peltier, each having a positive side and a negative side, each peltier communicating with the heat sink such that the negative side of each peltier is maintained at a common temperature;
- c. a reference standard, the reference standard communicating with the positive side of the peltier, the test piece communicating with the positive side of the test piece peltier;
- a. a data acquisition device, the data acquisition device able to record and compare the differences in temperatures of the test piece and the reference standard, whereby a higher temperature in the test piece than in the reference standard indicates the presence of corrosion, the differences in temperatures of the test piece and the reference standard obtained via electrical currents in the reference peltier and the test piece peltier; and
- d. an enclosure, wherein the heat sink, the reference peltier, and the reference standard are disposed within the enclosure.

3. The non-invasive corrosion sensor of claim 2, wherein the enclosure is manufactured from polycarbonate and environmentally sealed with flowable RTV silicone coating.

4. The non-invasive corrosion sensor of claim 3, wherein the test piece and the reference standard are manufactured from the same material.

5. The non-invasive corrosion sensor of claim 4, wherein the heat sink is manufactured from aluminum.

6. The non-invasive corrosion sensor of claim 5, wherein the reference standard is polished to remove all surface corrosion and contaminates and is sealed.

7. The non-invasive corrosion sensor of claim 6, wherein each negative side of each peltier is bonded to the heat sink with thermal epoxy.

5

8. The non-invasive corrosion sensor of claim **7**, wherein the thermal epoxy is a Zinc-Oxide/Silicon based grease.

9. The non-invasive corrosion sensor of claim **8**, wherein the thermal grease is about 60 to about 80% zinc oxide with dimethyl polysiloxane, silicone fluid and polymethysiloxane.

10. The non-invasive corrosion sensor of claim **9**, wherein the thermal grease has a specific gravity of about 2.2, its

6

solubility in water is negligible and has a flashpoint above 250 degrees Fahrenheit.

11. The non-invasive corrosion sensor of claim **10**, wherein the positive side of the reference peltier is bonded to the reference standard with thermal interface material.

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